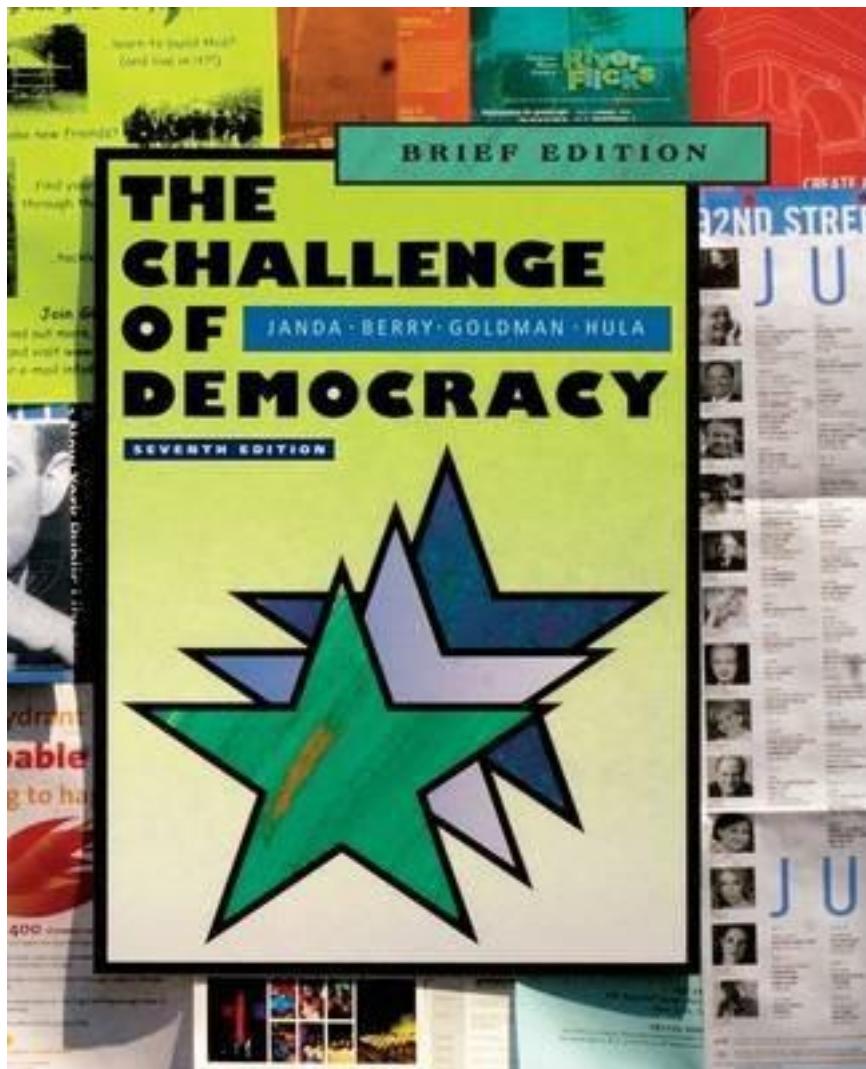


# The Challenge of Democracy : American Government in a Global World, Brief Edition



In this book (page 44) "An undemocratic Model: Elite Theory": Cheney Halliburton / George W. Bush Iraq War

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## An Undemocratic Model: Elite Theory

If pluralist democracy allows minorities to rule, how does it differ from **elite theory**—the view that a small group (a minority) makes most important government decisions? According to **elite theory**, important government decisions are made by an identifiable and stable minority that shares certain characteristics, usually vast wealth and business connections.<sup>28</sup>

**Elite theory** argues that these few individuals wield power in America because they control its key financial, communications, industrial, and government institutions. Their power derives from the vast wealth of America's largest corporations and the perceived importance of the continuing success of those corporations to the growth of the economy. An inner circle of top corporate leaders not only provides effective advocates for individual companies and for the interests of capitalism in general but also supplies people for top government jobs, from which they can continue to promote their interests. Elitists might point, for example, to the country's most recent vice president, **Dick Cheney**. He went from previous work as secretary of defense for President **George H. W. Bush** to becoming head of Halliburton, a large oil services company, and then back to government, where, as **George W.** Bush's vice president, he acted as an outspoken proponent of more energy exploration.

According to **elite theory**, the United States is not a democracy but an oligarchy. Although the voters appear to control the government through elections, **elite** theorists argue that the powerful few in society manage to define the issues and constrain the outcomes of government decision making to suit their